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the nation in its leaders was lost; and while the remote consequences of that distrust were incalculably pernicious, no one can regret the personal disgrace that overtook the perpetrators of so great a political fraud.

The events which occurred in the ten years following the overthrow of the coalition ministry are passed hurriedly over. Mr. Fox was, of course, active in opposition. He spoke often in the debates on the Regency question during the temporary incapacity of the sovereign. He opposed the accession of George III. as Elector of Hanover to the German confederation, and he was deceived by a letter from the Prince of Wales into an indignant denial of that person's marriage with Mrs. Fitzherbert, while Parliament was hesitating about the payment of his debts. The correspondence closes at the brink of the French Revolution. The course which Mr. Fox took during that stormy period is well known; but we take leave of him here. The curtain was soon to rise upon a drama more terrible than any in which he had ever acted; it fared ill with humanity, that his part in it could not be that to which his talents entitled him. Had he controlled the action of the English cabinet during the anarchic convulsions of France, it is not too much to say, that the horrors of the contest would have been mainly avoided. But this was not to be; for they who had counselled American coercion had gained over the young champion of liberty, and now counselled the measures which caused most of the atrocities of the intestine and foreign wars of the French Revolution.

ART. V. — *Bleak House*. By CHARLES DICKENS. *With Illustrations by H. K. BROWNE*. London: Bradbury and Evans. New York: Harper and Brothers. 1853.

A HUNDRED years ago, when Richardson and Sterne lent the weight of their example to the new-fangled plan of composing and publishing their fictitious compositions at intervals, some *laudator temporis acti* ill naturedly put forward his prediction that, in process of time, the evil practice would take such root

that dictionaries would appear in weekly parts, and even the Holy Scriptures themselves find their way into the world in monthly numbers. At the time, this was doubtless treated as an absurd prophecy, or as a singularly poor joke; but our fathers have lived to see it long since fulfilled to the very letter, and, so far as we can judge, with equal convenience to both publisher and purchaser. And the philosophy of the entire success of such a method, apparently so thoroughly discordant with every rule of good writing and pleasant reading, is perhaps very simple. It is a child's knowledge, that a shilling monthly during the year is a sum of much less magnitude than a half-guinea to be paid down on the first day of January; and experience has taught our publishing friends that where a popular book, like Peter Pindar's razor, is made to sell, there is scarcely a more advantageous way of disposing of it than by retailing cheap pennyworths at a time. More or less, to use the old proverb, money burns in the pockets of every body. It is vastly more agreeable, and, to a certain extent, more rational, to invest than to save; to purchase present comfort and future improvement, mental, moral, or physical, than to hoard up for years, through poverty and misery, an objectless little heap of shining counters, the tithe of which would have enabled the poor miser to cheer his own soul or body, or those of another less secretive than himself. A covetous fellow, says that astute peripatetic, honest Mat o' the Mint, like a jackdaw, steals what he was never made to enjoy, for the sake of hiding it; and truly, the feathered "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," as he gloats over his bits of broken glass and old buttons, secretly buried by the garden wall, is to our mind the happier biped of the two. The gryphon, in the wilderness of Milton, is the best emblem of such a man, "whose only care is to increase his store."

But false as may be the economy of spending twelve shillings *per annum* instead of ten, practice has shown it to be precisely the course most agreeable to "an enlightened public;" and therefore we suppose it will be pursued to the end of the chapter. And really, when a book is already written and complete, there can be but the question of expediency as to whether it shall be published in parts, or all at once and

entire. 'Drink your wine by the glassful,' says one; 'who would wish to put his mouth to the bottle, and take down the whole at a draught?' To which it may be replied: 'Set the bottle before me, that I may judge for myself of its contents, and drink one glassful, or two, or twenty, just how and when I please, not being compelled, like a sick child, to take a dose of a table-spoonful at a time, once in every hour.' Besides, who desires to pay for a full bottle, and find it one half lees, or with a choice group of tipsy flies overtaken in their cups and lying drowned at the bottom. There is many a book that opens with a note like that of a silver trumpet, with a martial sound, only to sink, some few chapters farther on, into the pitiful squeakings of a penny whistle; and many a reader, who begins a volume "in gladness," does not tarry long to discover, as Wordsworth has it, that

"Thereof comes in the end despondency and madness."

Therefore, on behalf of both reader and writer, we feel compelled to protest against this system of publication, albeit so much in vogue at the present day, in every case where the book is to be written as it comes out. It is unfair to both parties; to the reader it is so, because, after two years' subscription and constant payment, he may find his road end in a perfect slough of despond, and learn, from the author's perversity or pusillity of talent, that the book is of that class which Horace assures us

"Non homines, non Dî, non concessère columnæ."

Or the writer's death, or his own, may cut short two threads at the same time, and leave him just where poor Yorick was left, on the giving out of the Notary's manuscript. And what can be more provoking to the reader than such a circumstance as this? We appeal to a candid world, whether its curiosity has not been more stimulated and disappointed by this incident in the *Sentimental Journey*, than it has been gratified by all the discourse of my *Uncle Toby* and the trusty *Trim*? There is an anecdote told of a consumptive novel-reader at Bath, whose "day of life had reached its gloaming," and whose weeks were numbered, who could not die peacefully until he had stated his case to Mr. Richardson, and extracted from him,

in secret confidence, what was to be the *dénouement* of his half-published novel;— what would be the fate of the virtuous Pamela, when he himself should be scarce less insubstantial than that model heroine. And Milton himself tells us how he longed

“To call up him who left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold.”

And if there be thus much to complain of on the part of the reader, to such an author as Mr. Dickens, or Mr. Thackeray, the real inconvenience of the present system must, we opine, be far greater. The reader or the book may prematurely die; and, so far as the former is concerned, there is an end of the whole matter. His griefs live not after him. But the book is the author's pledge to immortality. When once a man hath printed and published, there is no longer any safety in saying, “Go to, I will die and be buried with my fathers, and be forgotten. The places that knew me shall know me no more, and my name shall no longer be heard among the children of men!” He may not hope so to escape from the just judgment of the world. The evil that men do, we are told, lives after them; and of the host of living authors, we sadly fear, the majority of their works are very evil works. A good book, whether its birth be welcomed or flouted at, will live, despite the world's cold scorn, and all “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.” Milton and Butler are just as secure in their niches in the Temple of Fame, as if *Hudibras* or *Paradise Lost* had been as heartily welcomed by Charles II., or that delightful old humbug, Pepys, as were the platitudes of Shadwel or Nahum Tate. Pepys himself will live;—vastly to his own surprise, no doubt, could his periwigged spirit peer up from the chancel vault of St. Olave's, and see what has been the fate of those secret and most mysteriously enciphered pages, whereon he inscribed the daily peccadilloes and backslidings of all of that little world—*quorum magna pars fuit*. He has done what Alonzo the Wise so censured the neglect of in Nature; he has opened the window in his breast, and we all run like children to a puppetshow, and greedily gaze in and gape at the pitiful spectacle, that is, with more or less variation, perpetually going on behind a curtain

in every heart around. Nay, even that wretch Tate, who, like some ill-nurtured jay, drowning in his discordant cries the sweet song of Philomel, stood between Dryden and the sun, will live;—even Tate's verses shall be said and sung wherever his native language is spoken the world around, as often as appears the anniversary of that blessed time when

“As shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.”

So much for any thing good which a man may write; but *væ illi*, if it be of the opposite complexion. Then, in vain does the greengrocer, the cheesemonger, or the all-consuming trunk-maker, interpose his friendly hand to wrap the dishonored head in sweet oblivion. If stupidly, evenly, inexorably dull, without a solitary elevation of thought or sentiment conveyed in the whole volume, there may be a good chance, perhaps, of its sinking quietly, like lead, deep into those black depths “where those who enter leave all hope behind.” Yet even then, the bright arrows of Apollo, (albeit the crooked form of Pope, or the warped soul of Byron, conceal the god,) may transfix the luckless fool in his downward flight, and pillory him to the ridicule and scorn of succeeding time. Still does hoarse Fitzgerald bawl his creaking couplets—still are the abashed wolves mute, while Ralph to Cynthia howls, making night hideous—long after the world would have ceased to recollect their very existence, had it not been for the professional friendship of a brother bard. But if there be any predominant trait in the luckless volume, if it should, by any misfortune, in the front of its offending, contain one bright thought, shining like a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, or a single redeeming passage of supereminent folly and inanity, who can say what will not be its destiny? For ages after, it may live to shake the sides and curl the nose of posterity. And, once entitled to rank in a catalogue as “curious and rare,” the stanch bibliomaniac, the provident collector, will ensure its preservation forevermore.

“ Unlike the swans, in Tuscan song display’d,
 He hovers eager o’er Oblivion’s shade,
 To snatch obscurest names from endless night,
 And give Cokain or Fletcher back to light ! ”

If such, then, is the unhappy lot of a bad book, even of one which, after every preparation and maturest reflection, its parent had resolved to inflict upon the community, — how much greater must be his danger who proclaims from the housetops the perception of every new thought ; who, from almost the first moment that the idea occurs to him, makes every winding in his plot, every detail in his narration, irrevocable ? We know that the best of books are frequently materially altered after they are first written ; that, for this very reason, an author’s first great production is very often his best, because it is more painfully elaborated, and more carefully weeded from each ill-guarded inconsistency or redundancy. The most successful of modern writers has chosen, for the motto to the revised edition of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, these self-condemnatory lines : —

“ Dum relego, scripsisse pudet ; quia plurima cerno
 Me quoque, qui feci, judice, digna lini.”

Pope, whom all men but Mr. Bowles concede to have been a master, not only in the *Ars Poetica*, but in that of sound criticism, teaches this to be the most important part of the author’s science : —

“ The greatest of all arts — the art to blot ! ”

But, in almost the fullest sense of the term, this fact seems to be entirely ignored by the teachers of the present day. What opportunity of revision can possibly exist in the case of a book published after the fashion of *Bleak House* ? The author himself, we fancy, would be the first person to discover and avail himself of the happy moment, were it ever to occur. Every man of such shining talents as he possesses, must be but too painfully sensible of the manifold blemishes entailed upon his productions from the very nature of their existence, *ex necessitate rei*. Did there ever live an author who could cook up, periodically, a moment of enthusiasm, or call down the divine afflatus regularly, once a month, just as he could order a man to come and cut his corns, or a sweep to cleanse

his chimneys ? When a poet puts his Pegasus in harness ; when he stoops to the enforced composition of so many pages *per diem*, he degrades his Muse to “ a vile mechanical,” and differs but in the amount of his pay and the fancied relative respectability of his occupation from the hand-loom weaver, who produces so many yards of carpet a week, or the penny-a-liner who stands booked for a daily column and a half of local items, whether the same consist of appalling murders, enormous gooseberries, or bicephalous kittens. Whatsoever be his motive, it is in vain to tell us that such a one writes because he is “ inspired by the sacred Nine.” They come not down from forked Olympus or the pleasant vale of Tempe to do the drudgery of maids of all work, even in the mansion of their most favored votaries. No ; let an author proclaim or conceal as he will the real causes that bring him before the world, whether it be the lust of notoriety, or the *sacra auri fames*, whether “ obliged by hunger — or request of friends,” he makes bold to claim our homage and respectful admiration ; but for mercy’s sake, do not expect us to believe, that, in these labor-saving days, a substitute for the original article, in the shape of an artificial patented Muse, has been invented at Lowell or Manchester, to go by clock-work, and to strike at so much a day.

It was with no little pleasure that, last winter, we saw Mr. Thackeray, for the first time, we believe, in his life, really seem to take the pains to secure for himself with posterity a position somewhat similar to that he has so well deserved among his contemporaries. We do not say that “ Henry Esmond ” will be more read, in the year nineteen hundred and fifty-three, than *Pendennis*, or *Vanity Fair* ; we would not like to risk our reputation for prophecy on the computation of how many readers Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray combined will have at that date ; probably, not more in proportion than Fielding and Smollett have now, however. But we do believe that *Henry Esmond*, as a work of art, is a more meritorious composition than either of its predecessors. The latter will, perhaps, always be the favorites, particularly with posterity, because they offer a true and faithful reflex of the manners of the time. The former, on the contrary, carries us back to the

days of Robinson Crusoe and the Spectator. In style, in manner, it is a perfect image of the age ; but it is a past age. It is but hearsay evidence, after all ; it possesses not enough of that indescribable air of truthfulness that distinguishes the recital of an eye-witness. Some of these days, let us hope, Mr. Thackeray will give to the world a work which shall not only combine the experience and the careful art of Henry Esmond, but shall, like Vanity Fair, have its own aim : —

“ The latent tracts, the giddy heights explore,
Of all who blindly creep on sightless soar ;
Eye Nature's walks, shoot Folly as it flies,
And catch the manners living as they rise.”

There is no great writer living who affords a stronger proof of the danger of disregarding the Horatian maxim — *nocturna versate manu, versate diurna* — than Mr. Dickens. His books bear upon their face abundant evidence of the manner of their composition ; all are plainly written *currente calamo*. In any author, we believe this to be an ill-considered habit, but in one of his peculiar mind, it becomes doubly amenable to just criticism. For, to us, it seems that his genius is marked by characteristics so entirely its own, so unlike any thing that we have ever met with in any other, that, considering their effects, we are almost free to consider them in any other regard than as desirable attributes. His mind, we conceive, is essentially deficient in the capacity of taking that broad, philosophical view of his subject, which so eminently distinguishes his great rival and admirer, the author of Vanity Fair. Each has made human folly and weakness the object of his study ; each is keen in unfolding to the world the intricacies of the mingled warp and woof of the soul, in pointing out the stains which disfigure the texture, in ridiculing the burlesque or enormous proportions of the pattern, or thrusting a finger — *monstrare digito* — through the holes or rotten places in the fabric. But the one holds the pencil of a Hogarth or a Watteau ; the other but wields the graver of Gilray or H. B. Mr. Dickens is, so to speak, only a caricaturist ; Mr. Thackeray is a grand social satirist. The former reminds us of one of those toys which we see exhibited in a goldsmith's window, a globular mirror, (generally in the figure of a globe borne upon the shoulders

of Atlas,) in which the unwary observer is transported with the sight of his own counterfeit resemblance, so unlike as to cause amazement, and so like as to inspire horror and disgust. While one particular feature is preternaturally distorted and exaggerated, the remainder show rather shorn of their fair proportions. The nose, for instance, will grow and swell at once into the bulk and length of that of the hapless Prince Rumpelstiltschen, in the nursery tale ; or one eye will expand and expand, till it seems almost the girth of that huge snake whose vast circumference encompasses this earth ; whilst every other feature in the face appears to retire back abashed from such an unwholesome vicinity. The latter, on the contrary, opens to us a prospect such as was afforded in the wizard chamber of Cornelius, by the mirror, huge and high, in which are depicted events and persons as they actually exist around us so vividly and naturally, that every one recognizes, or thinks he recognizes, the lineaments of some figure in the group. Let our readers put it to themselves, if this be not so. Who ever knew a Little Nell, or a Dick Swiveller, or a Marchioness ? Who can say he believes Sam Weller to be drawn from the life, or Kate Nickleby, or SMIKE, or Madeline Bray ? It is true, they live and move upon the stage as human beings ; else, they would be but the marionettes of a puppetshow, pulled with wires, — lay-figures, that would be hooted from the view. Some of them are like the *dramatis personæ* of every tale, endowed with just the requisite qualities necessary to fulfil the duties of that station in life to which it has pleased the author to call them, and then to fall back again into the crowd and be forgotten. But is not each and every one of them, that possesses any marked individuality of its own, evidently a caricature ? Does not a vein of the grossest exaggeration attend the exhibition of every characteristic trait that remains impressed upon the memory, when the volume is laid aside ? We are told, truly or not, that poor old Leigh Hunt is meant to be shown up, in the character of Mr. Harold Skimpole. Supposing this to be the case, (and we are loath even to suppose such a thing, which we do not believe,) where is the likeness ? If there is any, it is but that of a caricature.

On the other hand, how many of us have known Becky Sharpe; how many ladies have upon their visiting list a Blanche Amory, or an Amelia? Perhaps, however, it is of the softer sex that we are to inquire only for such personages as Annie Raby and Helen; Blanche, and Beatrix, and the little Princesse de Mogador are, after all, most likely to be the discoveries of men, who wisely keep their information to themselves. Go among the clubs; if you meet not Rawdon Crawley, young and old Pen, or Foker, that child of beer, you will certainly encounter their most intimate friends, men who think with their thoughts and talk with their tongues. Lady Jane, and little Fanny, and the true-hearted Laura,—who cannot find their parallels? We do not mean persons who have enacted precisely the same scenes that they have gone through,—who have performed the same feats and said the same things; for that would be an absurdity. But persons of whom our notions chime, with more or less precision, with those we receive from the book; people who would act very much in the same manner, were they placed in similar positions. Take an instance or two, where we can mention names without fear of scandal about Queen Elizabeth. Who does not think now of Mr. John Paul Jefferson Jones, when he reads Mr. Fenimore Cooper's impressions of the *bienséances* of English society, particularly as exemplified at a dinner table? There is not a deed done, or a speech spoken, by the most noble the Marquis of Gaunt, that we have ever heard attributed to the late Lord Hertford; and yet how unanimous has been the identification of his portraiture with the character of that much lamented nobleman and transcendent profligate? Who does not chuckle at the fancied discovery of Croker and Theodore Hook, under the disguises of Mr. Wenham and Mr. Wagg? Barry Lyndon and his unfortunate mistress—who are they but Stoney Bowes and the Countess of Strathmore? But we need not act the cicerone to Mr. Thackeray's portrait-gallery. Any reader, clever with the pencil, may readily illustrate his volumes with numerous sketches from domestic life, and the benefit of the plan would be seen in the fact, that, with the exception of public characters, no two sets of likenesses would at all resemble each other.

This propensity to infinitely exaggerate noticeable peculiarities, which we have remarked in our author, is by no means the worst fault that is rendered incurable by his method of publication. His style, in point of grammatical construction, is open to endless objection. We do not wish to deal hardly with this blemish — if blemish be the proper phrase to distinguish what almost amounts to a permanent feature.

Facies dicatur, an ulcus ?

Not only the misplacement and improper use of words continually appear, but there is no end of verbs without nominatives, nominatives without verbs, sentences without beginnings, beginnings without ends. Here, like a dog that has lost his master, a luckless pronoun wanders through the page, seeking vainly for the noun to which it refers ; there, an adjective is in the extremity of distress, like a ewe looking for its lamb, seeking its mysterious substantive ; while, between the twain, a disqualified because disqualifying adverb occupies an entire sentence, with no other part of speech venturing to come between the two periods, — just as we see, at a place of public exhibition, a whole row of people shrink from sitting on the same bench with some improper character, who, having taken her seat thereon, enjoys exclusive possession of it for the rest of the evening.

We will, presently, cite some passages from our author, and then the reader can decide upon the justness of our strictures. However, in regard to this manner of composition and publication, it is all matter for the writer's consideration ; it has almost ceased to be such of ours. The public has given the strongest evidence of its approbation ; it buys, and continues to buy. The publisher is well pleased, because it pays ; the author is not discontented, we suppose, for the same reason. Very well, gentlemen ; as the little fishes say in the Arabian tale, if you are satisfied, we are content ! But if the author writes in the spirit which he ought to write in, if he seeks for the approbation of posterity as well as the applause of to-day, he is pursuing a wrong course. There can be but one result to it ; nothing, bearing such constant and glaring marks of haste and inelegancy, can possibly win, or merit to win, aught but the ill-judging, and often merely tacit, approbation

which it receives from the crowd, to whose present and immediate appetite it panders. A book may thus please for a day ; but the desire will cease to operate, and with it, the unhealthy, meretricious pabulum, that served to gratify but a momentary lust, must cease to please, pass away, and be forgotten. The time will come when Mr. Dickens will find, as Sir Walter Scott did before him, that his powers are on the wane ; we do not know that there are not, even now, symptoms of such a state of things ; but the time never will come for them to stand on the same shelf with the *chefs d'œuvre* of Sir Walter. The defect in them is fatal. Like fruit stung by a worm, they ripen prematurely ; but alas ! as Touchstone says, they are rotten before they are ripe. They carry within themselves the seeds of their own decay. They will sink, to say the least, into the same condition that has already befallen those of Sterne ; and they will never be read, in after-times, as those of Sterne are to-day ; because, with infinitely less talent, they possess even greater eccentricity and exaggeration. Compared, too, to Mr. Dickens's, Sterne's style is terseness itself ; — no mean recommendation in reading the works of a half-forgotten author.

And yet there are some exquisite passages in Mr. Dickens's writings ; The Old Curiosity Shop and Nicholas Nickleby abound in such. There are some subjects upon which all human hearts feel in like manner ; the lives and deaths of little children ; the new-made grave ; the stern, inevitable barrier thrown between two faithful hearts ; — all these things come home to every bosom. Whenever he views matters and things with plain, common-sense eyes, he is natural and affecting ; whenever he gets upon his stilts, his fantastic gaits may amuse for a while, but soon they will essentially pall, and then, "good night to Marmion."

We regret that such is the case ; we regret that what has so often aroused and interested such a variety of passions in our breast should not continue to be the delight and instruction of succeeding generations. And we doubly regret what we are compelled to consider as the culpable haste, that must constantly prevent the natural exercise of our author's own better judgment. For really, it appears in him to be the pace

that kills; he is ever upon the full run; there is no time for revision, no chance for sober second thought to correct or modify a bald or incongruous passage. Other writers are often in a hurry; but few others seem to write with such hot haste and recklessness as this one. Perhaps, it is but another exemplification of the old adage about too many irons in the fire, &c. But it is not alone the looseness of his style that we complain of. He too often descends, we fear, from the level of his own dignity, to provoke merriment, — careless, apparently, as the buffoon in the ring, whether he is laughed with or laughed at. We read, and are heartily amused at, the description of the dog Diogenes, with his honest purposes and his inconsistent tail; but what, in the name of Sirius, is an “inconsistent tail?” We think many of our author’s tales are rather inconsistent; yet they amuse us; we laugh, *et voila tout!* Will posterity laugh? Will it even read? That ought to be the question. When we see Dick Swiveller watching from his bed of sickness the Marchioness at her bi-manual game of cribbage, and hear him cry out, “one for his nob,” or “two for his heels,” as the case may be, everybody laughs; but how many, on this side of the water, where cribbage is about as much played or understood as pam, ombre, or eighteen-penny tredille, have the least idea of what he means? We laugh from long practice, just as we do when Mr. Merryman enters the ring, with his “Here we are again, sir!” It is not at all funny to us; we know it is not; and yet we laughed then from the force of habit, just as we should do to-morrow, were a similar occasion to occur; just as our fathers laughed at things to us utterly vapid and silly; just as our children, ignoring all our slang catchwords and stale jokes, will continue to laugh at any thing that possesses real wit, and, in their turn, be merry at new cant and fresh fustian of their own. *Ainsi va le monde.* As the doubly-blessed Matilda Pottingen has it, the beef of to-morrow will succeed to the mutton of to-day, as the mutton of to-day succeeded to the veal of yesterday.

We suppose there is hardly one of our readers who is not perfectly familiar with the story of Bleak House. We have therefore refrained from saying any thing about the unravel-

ling of the plot. So far as that portion of the task is concerned, we think it creditable enough, and that it will compare favorably with the framework of any of the author's previous works. But we desire to substantiate some of the objections urged above to his manner. We will cite the opening lines of the book.

"London. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foothold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke, (if the day ever broke,) adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at these points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

"Fog every where. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

"Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongy fields, be seen to loom by husbandman and plough-boy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time—as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

“The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for a leaden-headed old corporation : Temple Bar. And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln’s Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

“Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of Heaven and Earth.”

Nothing that we could have cited will give a more correct idea of Mr. Dickens’s manner or his matter than this. It is clever, beyond all doubt ; and as it is the first step he makes into his subject, we are bound to suppose that he has essayed to put his best foot foremost, and produce upon the public mind, in the very commencement, an agreeable impression. We believe him to have succeeded ; and certainly, it was his duty to endeavor to do so. But, to our eyes, there is an air of slovenliness, or careless indifference about the forms of expression, contained in the preceding extract, that is all wrong. We recollect to have more than once heard it noticed, that, among all the imitations of the writings of popular English novelists that have appeared from the pen of Mr. Thackeray, none of Mr. Dickens has ever been given. There are more reasons than one why this should be the case. With Bulwer, or D’Israeli, or Ainsworth, or James, no one ever thought of comparing the historian of the great Hoggarty Diamond ; but of Mr. Dickens he is not only the friend and professed admirer, but the actual rival. It would be in the extremity of bad taste for him to attempt to burlesque, or turn into open ridicule, one to whom he occupies such a position. Nevertheless, it would seem impossible for such a mind as Thackeray’s to keep a perpetual restraint upon its workings, and not (doubtlessly unperceived by himself) fall occasionally into the vein of giving a sly hit at the foible of his friend. A volume at our elbow affords an instance in point. It occurs in a description of a combat in which a rider is stricken down, and the steed dashes away masterless.

“Away ! aye, away !—away amid the green vineyards and golden
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cornfields; away up the steep mountains, where he frightened the eagles in their eyries; away down the clattering ravines, where the flashing cataracts tumble; away through the dark pine forests, where the hungry wolves are howling; away over the dreary wolds, where the wild wind walks alone; away through the plashing quagmires, where the will-o'-the-wisps slunk, frightened, among the reeds; away through light and darkness, storm and sunshine; away by tower and town, highroad and hamlet. Once a turnpikeman would have detained him; but, ha, ha! he charged the 'pike, and cleared it at a bound. Once the Cologne Diligence stopped the way; he charged the Diligence, he knocked off the cap of the conductor on the roof, and yet galloped wildly, madly, furiously, irresistibly on! Brave horse! gallant steed! panting child of Araby! On went the horse, over mountains, rivers, turnpikes, apple-women; and never stopped until he reached a livery-stable in Cologne, where his master was accustomed to put him up."

It is amusing to see how the palpable imitation, which bursts out so boldly into full flower in the beginning of the above extract, falls into bathos at the end. But who can help feeling regret to behold such talents as each of these authors possess, so often miserably wasted? What would seem more rational than that men, who *can* do so much better, should endeavor to compose in such wise that their books might be the permanent delights of this generation and the next, instead of being but the toy of the moment, to be broken up and thrown away in a half-hour? What shall we say to our sons, when they ask of us the evidences of the fame which we will tell them these authors had in our day? What would Swift or De Foe be rated at now, had Gulliver's Travels or Robinson Crusoe been thus pitched into the world? They might have amused Bolingbroke or Lady Mary; but they would scarcely find a bookseller now enterprising enough to republish them, instead of occupying, as they do, the post of honor in every library.

In point of literary merit, then, we think that Bleak House is a falling off from its predecessors. In fact, ever since Nicholas Nickleby and the Old Curiosity Shop, we are of opinion that Mr. Dickens's works have declined in interest. That they are all clever, is not to be denied: people would not endure the continued jargon in which the tale is told,

were it not that the mass is leavened by constant sprightliness of thought, and not unfrequently by exhibitions of positive genius. But we greatly fear that the author, for some years past, has had more on his hands than he could properly attend to. What with his editorial connection with the London Daily News, and, later, with Household Words; his Child's History of England; his regular Christmas Stories, and the innumerable calls upon his time and attention at public dinners, dramatic festivals, and every popular occasion of a literary character, we can readily conceive that to prepare, besides, three or four dozen octavo pages, of a complicated novel, monthly, for the press, is almost more than any man can do, and do well. And this, again, involves the whole ground of our complaint; it is, indeed, the *leterrima causa belli*.

There is one feature in Mr. Dickens's novels that, we think, must have struck every reader. It is the ready way in which a refractory character is disposed of, the moment he becomes troublesome. There is no need of resorting to any of those agreeable, but slightly improbable, expedients described in the tales of our childhood, where, by merely clapping one's hands thrice, a genii, or a griffin, or a hundred black slaves clothed in white, bearing jars of jewels on their heads, enter, prepared to fulfil the most preposterous behest. No; the days of Prince Camaralzaman and the Princess of China are gone by forever; our author simply calls in the aid of some of Death's ambassadors extraordinary or ministers plenipotentiary, and, presto! the deed is done. Really, the atmosphere of his books seems to be as unhealthy to any officious personage whom his father's sins, or his own, have thrust into a too prominent position before the public, as that of the Old Bailey Assizes, with Mr. Baron Page, or any other "hanging judge" upon the bench, to the unfortunate wretch to whom a due regard to the commercial and other vested interests of the nation forbids the extension of those hopes of mercy here that he is bidden to seek for hereafter. *Sus. per coll.* runs through every volume, as surely as through the Newgate Calendar. Oliver Twist, the first of the series *suo sponte*, (for the Pickwick Papers are understood to have been originally started but as text to poor Seymour's sketches) favors us

with the adventurous careers of a bold burglar or twain, and the tragic termination of Messieurs Sykes and Fagin, the one by an unfortunate slip of the noose, the other by the officious assistance of Mr. Calcraft. Besides, we have the murder of poor Nancy, just at the nick of time, when it was impossible to keep her up any longer. For no one can know better than Mr. Dickens, that such a character as that girl's, in her position in the stews of London, was a moral impossibility. Nicholas Nickleby, to use one of his own expressions, "draws it rather mild," and we are spared Tyburn Hill and its attendant horrors ; but no sooner does old Ralph find that, by his own misconduct, it is become absolutely necessary, for the peace of his family and the satisfaction of the public, that he should cease to exist, than, without resorting to the humdrum practice of calling in an apothecary and two or three physicians, he jumps at the conclusion, that,

"What Cato did, and Addison approved,
Cannot be wrong ;"

and, Judas-like, straightway goes and hangs himself. A decent regard, perhaps, to the opinions of mankind compelled him to fulfil the wishes of more than one of the acquaintance introduced to him by Mr. Dickens, that he should die in his shoes ; and accordingly, at the critical moment, he is found swinging heavily from a peg behind his own back door. The Old Curiosity Shop has but a death by drowning. But, to make up for this, Barnaby Rudge contains some recondite murders, with a lot of blind assassins, choice felonies, and — oh, rare ! a hangman to be hanged on his own gibbet, by way of pendant to the whole. In Martin Chuzzlewit, revolvers and bowie-knives clank pleasantly together in symphony, while the sublime Montague Tigg (and with him all the hopes of the great Anglo-Bengalee Company, porter and all) expires beneath the brutal hand of Mr. Jonas, and the indefatigable Nudgett, — the prototype of the detecting Bucket, — shines out in all his glory, as from one dock to another the murderer is haled away to condign punishment. David Copperfield conforms to the progress of the times. Where Bill Sykes, or the Dodger, would have swung as high as Haman, Mr. Littimer and Uriah Heep are but sent to cheer, with their

hideous mockery of reformation, one of her majesty's model gaols. The picture, nevertheless, of their immurement,—and, perhaps, it is a wholesome one,—is not spared us. We could well exchange it, though, for some good old-fashioned Bridewell,—such a one as Hogarth paints in the Harlot's Progress,—provided Mr. Justice Creedle, under whose personal care the model convicts are placed, were there to bear them company at pulling the hemp wherewith, perchance, to adorn his own neck, or, Ixion-like, wearily to tread the still revolving mill, with just such a cruel lash at his back as the painter has placed in the hand of the cold-eyed turnkey.

And now, coming to Bleak House, we thought we had supped full on horrors; that the dagger and the bowie had had their day; and that, since capital punishment had been generally abolished for less offences than the taking of human life, we might reasonably hope for a short respite from such ghastly chapters. But, oh, poor human foresight! we not only have a “highly interesting case of murder,” (and that, too, of a lawyer, to make the matter more characteristic and personal); but, after all the horrible particulars of the most frightful form of shuffling off this mortal coil that ever entered into the mind of poor sinner, praying on bended knees for Almighty deliverance from battle, murder, and sudden death, we have it all served up to us again, as a *réchauffée*, by the coroner's inquest, and a popular parody of the same, accompanied by Mr. Squills on the piano-forte, at the Sal's Arms, in the evening.

Now, with all due deference to the better judgment of Mr. Dickens and the British public, we must say there is something too much of this. We would not limit an author in making the most of all the paraphernalia with which the imagination surrounds a bloody or mysterious death. When he finds it advisable to put one of his most impracticable subjects out of sight, and finds he cannot do better, by way of working up popular interest to a suitable height, than to knock him on the head or open the jugular,—why, in the name of all that novel-writers revere, let an author do so. Let him even show us, with an awful, solemn air, and with solemn words that thrill us through to our inmost core, (for we all know we like it occasionally, and persist in gloating

over the page till the candle dies in the socket, and the letters seem swimming before us, and then creep, shiveringly, to bed,) the bloody knife—the spots upon the stair—the gory finger-traces left upon the pillow, pressed down with the weight of that head that shall never press it more—the fair young locks or reverend tresses stiff with clotted, curdled blood, and that blood its own;—but, for decency's sake, let there be a stop somewhere. Let it be remembered that we are not an audience of undertakers or of body-snatchers. We cannot, for month after month, and year after year, with healthy appetites, break our fasts upon such diet. Once or twice may do very well for an example, just as we sometimes, with passive nonresistance, wink at the exercise of Judge Lynch's interpretation of the *lex talionis*, when we are not personally indictable therefor. As an occasional thing, the class of sensations excited by such scenes as we may fairly term unnatural, since they are in violation of all our natural laws, is far from being disagreeable to our palates, morbid it may be, or sated with a more innocent diet. There are periods when the mind craves such excitement; it longs to be led to the ghostly, guilty chamber, where the cup of crime and sin had at last been filled to the brim and overflowed; to stand in the twilight gloom, with heart beating as audibly as the eternal ticking of the great clock, that seems throbbing with the consciousness of the dreadful tale:—

“The dial spake not, but it made shrewd signs,
And pointed full upon the stroke of murder;”

to mark the dim spots upon the floor,—spots the like never by it seen before, faint, black, not singular in their appearance, but which at once it knows for blood; to trace by them the dying man's agony, from his bed to the door, “and thence by mazy doubles to the grated casement,” there to sink in abject horror beneath the mortal stroke. These are all legitimate matters for the artist's pencil; but the perpetual repetition of such scenes may be well objected to, if merely on the score of good taste, particularly when the brush is laid on coarsely, and the subject in itself not over delicate. It is not fair to ask us to sit tamely by, and see every disagreeable old repro-

bate's legs knocked from under him in this style, and himself disposed of with all those circumstances of

"Horrible and awful,
Which e'en to name would be unlawful,"

which seem now to garnish each bloody dish that is served up to us. We think a daily *post mortem* a very bad whet to one's appetite for dinner.

It will be recollected that, in Bleak House, there is a singular sort of character,—an uncouth, miserly, rusty, drunken old creature, named Krooks, nicknamed by his neighbors the Lord Chancellor. When the proper time arrives for this old toper to drain his last tankard, and go where Toby Tossopot, King Cole, and so many other lusty bibbers have convivially gone before, it would never do to let him make a natural exit from the stage. As his life has been far from pleasant to his fellow-beings, there is a poetical justice in making his death as disagreeable as possible to himself; and, accordingly, since *spontaneous combustion* is generally considered as undesirable in practice as it is unhackneyed in novels, that method of finishing him off is resorted to. In the whole course of our experience in novel-reading, we remember but two other instances. The first is in Jacob Faithful, where the mother of that young waterman vanishes, in a drunken fit, on board of the lighter, leaving nothing behind her (not even a widower, for *he* incontinently jumps overboard, and is drowned in the Thames) but a handful of ashes in the sheet where she was reposing, and a very unsatisfactory smell. The other case occurs in a singularly silly book, called the "Confessions of an Eton Boy," in the last chapter of which a honeymoon is suddenly wound up by the disappearance of "the happiest of men" into the untimely bowels of a blue shark, on the coast of Van Diemen's Land, and the death of the heroine through spontaneous combustion,—and all told with a stern brevity which, considering the circumstances of the case, and how much room there was for describing the peculiarities of their position, is only equalled by the immortal Ingoldsby's *resumé* of the career of a certain little boy,

"Who ran away on board a ship, and far beyond the seas,
Got scraped to death with oyster shells, among the Caribbees!"

Our author, however, is more diffuse than the Eton Boy, in his account of Mr. Kroop's demise.

"Mr. Guppy, sitting on the window-sill, nodding his head and balancing all these possibilities in his mind, continues thoughtfully to tap it, and clasp it, and measure it with his hand, until he hastily draws his hand away. 'What, in the devil's name,' he says, 'is this! Look at my fingers!'

"A thick, yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight, and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both shudder.

" 'What have you been doing here? What have you been pouring out of the window?'

" 'I pouring out of the window! Nothing, I swear! Never, since I have been here!' cries the lodger.

"And yet look here — and look here! When he brings the candle, here, from the corner of the window-sill, it slowly drips and creeps away down the bricks; here, lies in a little thick nauseous pool.

" 'This is a horrible house,' says Mr. Guppy, shutting down the window. 'Give me some water, or I shall cut my hand off.'

"He so washes, and rubs, and scrubs, and smells, and washes, that he has not long restored himself with a glass of brandy, and stood silently before the fire, when St. Paul's bell strikes twelve, and all those other bells strike twelve from their towers of various heights in the dark air, and in their many tones. When all is quiet again, the lodger says: 'It's the appointed time, at last. Shall I go?'

"Mr. Guppy nods, and gives him a 'lucky' touch on the back; but not with the washed hand, though it is his right hand. He goes down stairs; and Mr. Guppy tries to compose himself, before the fire, for waiting a long time. But in no more than a minute or two the stairs creak, and Tony comes swiftly back.

" 'Have you got them?'

" 'Got them! No. The old man's not there.'

"He has been so horribly frightened in the short interval, that his terror seizes the other, who makes a rush at him, and asks, loudly, 'What's the matter?'

" 'I couldn't make him hear, and I softly opened the door and looked in. And the burning smell is there — and the soot is there, and the oil is there — and he is not there!' Tony ends this with a groan.

"Mr. Guppy takes the light. They go down, more dead than alive, and holding one another, push open the door of the back shop. The cat has retreated close to it, and stands snarling — not at them; at

something on the ground, before the fire. There is very little fire left in the grate, but there is a smouldering, suffocating vapor in the room, and a dark greasy coating on the walls and ceiling. The chairs and table, and the bottle, so rarely absent from the table, all stand as usual. On one chair-back, hang the old man's hairy cap and coat.

" 'Look!' whispers the lodger, pointing his friend's attention to these objects, with a trembling finger. 'I told you so. When I saw him last, he took his cap off, took out the little bundle of old letters, hung his cap on the back of the chair — his coat was there already, for he had pulled that off before he went to put the shutters up — and I left him turning the letters over in his hand, standing just where that crumpled black thing is upon the floor.'

"Is he hanging somewhere? They look up. No.

" 'See!' whispers Tony. 'At the foot of the same chair, there lies a dirty bit of thin red cord that they tie up pens with. That went round the letters. He undid it slowly, leering and laughing at me, before he began to turn them over, and threw it there. I saw it fall.'

" 'What's the matter with the cat?' says Mr. Guppy. 'Look at her!'

" 'Mad, I think. And no wonder, in this evil place.'

"They advance slowly, looking at all these things. The cat remains where they found her, still snarling at something on the ground, before the fire and between the two chairs. What is it! Hold up the light!

"Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is — is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? Oh, horror, he *is* here! and this, from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him.

"Help, help, help! come into this house, for Heaven's sake!

"Plenty will come in, but none can help. The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally — inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humors of the vicious body itself, and that only — Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died."

So much for Mr. Dickens, upon spontaneous combustion, concerning which we have a word or two to say. On the appearance of the number of *Bleak House* containing this account, its unnaturalness was at once proclaimed by some of the London press, and the disease was declared to be even more than an improbability. It was an impossibility; such an outworn theory as should be forthwith exploded,—banished from the text-books of sensible physicians. Mr. Dickens not only defended his position in the papers, but he availed himself of one advantage his mode of publication afforded;—he vindicated it in the next number, and by a sort of back-handed blow, entirely got the advantage of his adversaries, who were compelled to talk out of sight and out of hearing of ninety-nine hundredths of his readers. And as he puts his statements with equal looseness and positiveness, it is as well to endeavor to give in this place a brief glance at the estimation in which the theory of this sort of cases is held by the most competent authorities. It is not an unusual thing in the annals of European jurisprudence, to see a criminal cheating, or seeking to cheat, the gallows, on the hypothesis that the victim encountered death from this cause; and in time with Grisi, Ostend oysters, and other foreign luxuries, the same line of defence may cross the seas, and be put forward here. It is therefore as well to be prepared, betimes, for its reception.

The history of any such scientific subject, not readily susceptible of direct and immediate proof, must always be for a season eminently controversial. We have all, in late years, seen the fact of deaths from *hydrophobia* (speaking in a popular sense) doubted or denied by a large and learned portion of the faculty. Thirty or forty years ago, nobody questioned its reality. The humane practice of clapping the suspected one between two feather beds, and so smothering him, was so common an event in rural practice in England, that, when Sir Vicary Gibbs announced his intention of proceeding, on the part of the crown, criminally against all future participators in this ingenious occupation, he was regarded with disgust by half the old wives in the land. Then for a long while, (as though, when the dogs found there was no

more feather-bed work to be done, they had given up the trade,) we heard no more of death from hydrophobia. People rarely were bitten by rabid animals; or if they were, it seemed as though

“ The man recovered from the bite :
The dog it was that died ; ”

until, at last, a fortunate and unquestionable case occurring in the Hospital at Philadelphia, in the very midst of a terrible show of disagreeing doctors, settled the matter forever. Whether this will be the case with spontaneous combustion, or not, remains to be seen. After an undisturbed reign of a century or more, its legitimacy has, of late, been very shrewdly questioned, and that by men of no little mark. But our readers shall hear for themselves.

Following the strict meaning of the words, we agree with Devergie (*Méd. Lég.* vol. ii. p. 274, and *Ann. d'Hyg. Pub.* vol. 46, p. 383) that there is not on credible record a single case of spontaneous human combustion, — that is, of a combustion partial or entire of the human body, *durante vitâ*, without the aid of ignition from external causes. But in its looser and popular sense, the phrase is usually employed to denote the condition of preternatural susceptibility of the living body to become ignited by foreign assistance, and to be consumed with singular rapidity. As it seems to us that the former ground is generally abandoned as untenable by the most judicious of writers on the subject, (even though they may incline favorably to the other method of putting the case,) we will not devote much space to its consideration. The real battle lies in the possibility or impossibility of the second division of the question; and to it we propose devoting the rest of this paper.

Perhaps this will be the most proper place to note the alleged phenomena that are said to accompany the occurrence of this hideous disorder, in order that our readers may fairly understand the nature of the ensuing remarks. According to Orfila, as quoted by Taylor, (*Med. Jurisp.* p. 255,) and with whom Dr. John Apjohn, in the *Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine* of Forbes, Tweedie, and Connolly, concurs, they are as follows.

1. The victims are almost always women, old, intemperate, and corpulent; though where, as is sometimes the case, extreme emaciation instead of great stoutness is the result of hard drinking, the disease may appear. The winter time is almost the only season in which it is said to have occurred.

2. A light blue flame appears lambent over the part which is about to be attacked, inextinguishable by water, and not readily communicable to inflammable bodies placed in its vicinity. The combustion spreads with extreme rapidity, quickly decomposing the greater part of the body, particularly the trunk, while the head, hands, and feet are often spared. The walls and furniture of the apartment are covered with a thick, greasy, fetid soot, and the air impregnated with an offensive empyreumatic odor. What is most curious of all, however, is that the articles around the body are seldom affected by its combustion; even the clothes upon it sometimes are not burned.

The earliest recorded case, that we find, is one quoted by Prof. Johnson, from Claromontius, who lived towards the close of the seventeenth century. This, however, like another mentioned in the *Actes de Copenhagen*, under the date of 1692, presents too little of accurate detail to authorize us to do any thing more than to refer to them. The most important examples that are known are as follows.

Bianchini, of Verona, gives that of the Countess Cornelia Baudi, an Italian, aged sixty-two years, who was in the habit of bathing her body in spirits of camphor. On entering her chamber one morning, the maid, who had seen her go to sleep apparently in good health the night previous, discovered her remains upon the floor. The legs and arms and a portion of the head alone were unconsumed. A heap of ashes, emitting a greasy fetid moisture when touched, was all that remained of the rest of the corpse. A sooty substance had deposited itself on the furniture and walls, even penetrating to the linen in closed drawers. The bedclothes were slightly disturbed, as though she had risen quietly from her couch, and the wax of two candles on a table hard by had melted with the heat, while their wicks remained unconsumed. This case was communicated to the Royal Society, at London, by Dr. Mortimer, and was

published in the Philosophical Transactions for 1745, and in the Annual Register of 1763.

The case mentioned by Lecat has always been so much dwelt upon, by those who have debated this subject, that we will briefly state it here. The victim was a woman named Millet, who lived at Rheims, in 1725, in the same dwelling with Lecat. She was a drunken creature, and did not live happily with her husband, who seems to have been attached to her pretty serving-maid. On the 20th of April, 1725, the woman Millet was found near the fireplace, in the kitchen, entirely burned up, with the exception of the feet and some parts of the head and the vertebræ. A small portion of the flooring, beneath the body, seems to have been all else that was damaged by the fire. Millet was tried for the murder, and convicted; but a superior court reversed the sentence, on the supposition of the cause having been spontaneous combustion, and he married the pretty serving-maid,—a circumstance that will always throw a doubt over our minds as to Mr. Millet's innocence. A number of other cases might be quoted; but to do so would be unnecessary, as they are all, mainly, alike. That of Bertholi, a friar, however, may be given in some detail. This man, says Dr. Apjohn, who lived at Mount Volere, went to the fair of Filetto, and, having walked about all day, retired, in the evening, to the house of a relation at Feuille, to spend the night. Upon his arrival, he went directly to his bedroom, and had a handkerchief placed between his shoulders, beneath his shirt. In a few minutes after, having been left alone, a singular noise, mingled with cries, was heard from his room; and when the people of the house rushed in, they found him on the floor, surrounded by a lambent flame, which retired as they approached. When visited the next morning by Joseph Battaglia, a surgeon of Ponte Basio, the integuments of the right arm were found loosened from the muscles and hanging down, and those of the back, between the shoulders and the thighs, were in the same condition. The account which the patient gave of his singular attack, was, that he felt a blow upon the right arm, as if inflicted by a club, and then saw a spark hanging to his shirt-sleeve, which immediately reduced it to ashes. The handkerchief already spoken of, as

also his drawers, were uninjured; but his nightcap was consumed, though his hair was not touched. He survived four days, in great suffering, and then died, leaving a case of perfect incomprehensibility to the world. Those who believe in spontaneous combustion ascribe it to electricity, and what not; others, again, are rather incredulous. The Baron de Liebig makes very merry over the fact of the nightcap being burned, and the hair on the head escaping scot-free. If it is admitted, says he, that the priest had his nightcap on his head, as is necessarily supposed by the narrator, (for if the cap had been burned upon a chair, the salvation of his locks would not be at all wonderful,) there is here but the effect of chance; we cannot suppose the nightcap was consumed by any such peculiar and unknown flame as is contended. Whatever might have been the condition of Bertholi's health, the nightcap did not participate in that condition. It was not sick; it possessed no preternatural susceptibility to spontaneous ignition; the same sort of fire that will consume a tress of hair would have consumed it. If the real truth of the matter could ever be shown, we apprehend that it would appear the priest was drunk — a natural enough conclusion to a day spent at a fair by an Italian friar, in those times — and set fire to himself from a lamp which was in his chamber.

But the blue flame, *that receded from the approach of strangers*, and defied examination, is no bad emblem of many of these stories. It is impossible to put them to a satisfactory test; and most of them are disfigured by such suspicious circumstances as to naturally impel the mind to suspect other causes than that alleged to have produced the death. A man and his wife, in the lower classes, live unhappily together; they get drunk; they quarrel; the neighbors hear a struggle in their apartments, and the next morning her corpse is found, nearly burnt up; and this is a good case of spontaneous combustion. A drunken woman, with a lighted pipe in her mouth, seats herself at night before the fire, and the next day she affords a similar experience. Mr. O'Niel, keeper of the Five Pounds Almshouse in the city of Limerick, is awakened, at two o'clock in the morning, by one of the paupers, who complains that a fellow-lodger, in the

room above, has burned a hole through the ceiling and entered his apartment; and, on examination, Mrs. Peacock, "burning with fire and as red as copper," is found to have been the intruder; and the Methodist Magazine for 1809 (on the authority of which this tale is told) informs us that every observer, recalling the well-authenticated circumstance of her having recently been guilty of several derelictions from truth, was obliged to resolve so awful an event into "the visitation of God's judgment, in the punishment of a daring and persevering sinner!" To match this, we have the specific of holy water, which, after the failure of all other remedies, has been found in France an infallible cure in cases of spontaneous combustion, otherwise inextinguishable by all the waters of the ocean. But the most singular of all these cases, got up apparently to bolster a dubious theory, is a story, which appeared not long ago in one of the most respectable journals in the world, and was copied thence half over Europe. It contains, probably, just as much truth as many of the instances cited in the books on this subject, and may be repeated here as a specimen of the impostures the public are continually subjected to.

"A most extraordinary circumstance," (says the *Journal des Debats*, of February 24th, 1850,) "has recently transpired at a *cabaret* of the *Barrière de l'Étoile* at Paris. A man by the name of Xavier G —, a journeyman painter, of grossly intemperate habits, being on a drinking bout with some of his boon companions, wagered that he would devour a lighted candle. Scarcely had he introduced the flaming wick into his mouth, when he gave a faint cry and sank upon the floor, amidst the amazement of the whole company. A bluish flame played upon his lips; his friends, seeking to succor him, were seized with horror on perceiving that the unhappy man was consuming within. In less than half an hour, his head and the upper part of his chest were completely carbonized. Two physicians were on the spot, and pronounced the case to be one of spontaneous combustion, a phenomenon well known to science, but not, as yet, susceptible of explanation."

A number of observations, upon the characteristics of this disorder, followed; but they need not be repeated here. The paragraph was, however, widely copied, and excited the attention of scientific men in various regions to such a degree,

that an investigation was set on foot by some curious gentlemen; and what, will it be guessed, was the result of their inquiries? Simply, that the whole story was false. Professor Regnault and M. Pelouze, the well-known chemist, having looked carefully into the matter, were utterly unable to discover the least trace either of the accident itself, or of the two medical men who stood by; and, to crown all, the notice of M. Carrier, the *Préfet de Police*, having been called to the story, he very soon traced the fable to its source, and publicly declared it to be a miserable imposture, without one solitary ground for credibility. No such man, no such circumstance, ever existed.

The murder of the Countess de Goerlitz, in 1849, by her domestic, and the man's attempt to divert suspicion from himself by causing it to appear that she was a victim to spontaneous combustion, produced an investigation which, while it resulted in his condemnation, gave a severe blow to the general belief in the disease itself. Many of the first men in their line in Germany,—Liebig, Bischoff, and others, decidedly ignore it, and protest that it should be erased from the rolls of respectable practitioners. Others, again, chiefly in France and England, adhere to the old faith. It is certain, however, that it is under a cloud just at present, and Mr. Dickens has had hard work in persuading some of his readers that Krooks is really and legitimately “done to death,” and off the stage, with no chance of popping up into life again, like a Jack-in-the-box, utterly falsifying the verdict of the inquest and the sixfooter so generously furnished him by his administrator. Whether it will succeed in keeping its hold upon the faith of men, or whether, after being haled down from its high estate, and rudely buffeted between friends and foes in the contest, it may be sent, for a season, into exile, to be restored by the united voices of reason and experience, and come back upon us

Like a glory from afar,
Or a re-appearing star,

it is difficult to predict. We heartily wish the world were well rid of it; but it has possession, and that is nine points of the law. Still, we are convinced that, the more atten-

tion is paid to the subject, the rarer will be its occurrence; and, if there be any truth at all in the numerous theories presented to us, it may be simplified into this: that, by an unnatural and excessive use of alcohol, the living human body *may* become susceptible of ignition and combustion to an extraordinary degree, in which case its unctuous particles will serve to feed the flames. But this can only be effected under peculiar circumstances, and by external aid. And for any thing beyond this point, we can find no support in physiology or elsewhere.

We must apologize for having dwelt so long upon a theme so unsatisfactory. It is not agreeable to reflect on the possibility of one's flaming out like a lime-kiln, as a necessary sequence to an unknown quantity of sherry or madeira. The philosophy of Captain Macheath's song in the Beggar's Opera,

"A man can die
Much bolder with brandy,"

is not a sound philosophy at all, in this view of the case. But the question arose so naturally, from the volumes under examination, and is, besides, one so novel to most readers, that we thought it well to devote a few pages to its elucidation.

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- Art. VI. — 1. *Italian Irrigation: a Report on the Agricultural Canals of Piedmont and Lombardy, addressed to the Honorable the Court of Directors of the East India Company.* By R. BAIRD SMITH, F. G. S., Captain in the Army, and First Lieutenant of Engineers Bengal Presidency. Printed by Order. London and Edinburgh. 1852. 2 vols. 8vo.
2. *The Calcutta Review*, Vol. XII. July – December, 1849. Art. III. *Canals of Irrigation in the N. W. Provinces.* Calcutta, 1849. 8vo.
3. *Notes on the North Western Provinces of India.* By CHARLES RAIKES, Magistrate and Collector of Mynpoorie. London. 1852. 8vo.

THE traveller in India, after passing the holy city of Be-